

## **Conference Report on the International Conference “Perpetrators: Challenges and Chances of Presentations in Memorial Museums”**

– Presented by the International Committee of Memorial Museums for the Remembrance of Victims of Public Crimes (IC MEMO) and the Wewelsburg District Museum in cooperation with the Hannah Arendt Institute for Research on Totalitarianism at the Dresden University of Technology and the Landeszentrale für politische Bildung, Nordrhein-Westfalen, October 6-9, 2010, Wewelsburg, Büren, Germany.

### Wednesday, October 6, 2010

In his evening lecture, Vojtěch Blodig, Senior Manager of the Terezín Memorial, Czech Republic, presented the topic of the persecution and deportation of the European Jews using the example of Theresienstadt. He described in detail the development of the ghetto there for the Jews of the Nazis’ “Protectorate of Bohemia and Moravia” and from other European countries ruled by the National Socialist regime. He described the main functions of the ghetto with the emphasis on its propaganda function.

### Thursday, October 7, 2010

After a greeting from the District Director of the District Administration of Paderborn, Heinz Köhler, the Director of the Wewelsburg District Museum, Wulff E. Brebeck, and the Chairman of IC MEMO, Vojtěch Blodig, the participants were guided through the new permanent exhibition of the Wewelsburg District Museum, “Ideology and Terror of the SS” on the morning of the first day of the conference.

This exhibition on the historical site of Wewelsburg, which was set up by Reichsführer SS (Reich Leader SS) Heinrich Himmler in 1933 as an ideological center for his Schutzstaffel (SS – “Protective Squadron”), provides information in seven thematic units on the thematic and chronological placement of the SS and the Wewelsburg, the social structure and organization of the SS, including the biographies of SS perpetrators, the worldview and mentality of the SS personnel, and the crimes of this Nazi terror organization. Other themes of the exhibition, which has a sober design and makes use of numerous original items, are “Exclusion – SS and Persecution”, “SS and the public sphere”, “Choice of Elites – In Search of Role Models”, “Myths – Rules – Rituals: Inner Worlds of the SS”, and Wewelsburg as the site of Niederhagen Concentration Camp, information on postwar history, and how people deal with the past, with victims, and with perpetrators. The

exhibition's narrative concludes with an outlook onto democracy and open discourse about history

The District Museum aims to bring 60,000 visitors a year into the Wewelsburg. The German federal government provided 6 million euros in partial funding of the remodeling. (For additional information, see: <http://www.wewelsburg.de/en/wewelsburg-1933-1945/dauerausstellung/ausstellungsplan.php>.)

The visit to the exhibition was followed by an excursion through the exterior area of the Renaissance palace that, during the Third Reich on Heinrich Himmler's orders, was turned into a castle reminiscent of the Middle Ages. Viewing the tower with its so-called Obergruppenführersaal (superior group leader hall) provided glimpses of how present-day rightwing extremist groups use as symbols the Nazi insignia still present there. Also viewed, outside the museum complex, were the village surrounding Wewelsburg, the earlier village community house ("Ottens Hof") with Germanic symbols from the 1930s, and the former Concentration Camp Niederhagen and its firing range were viewed.

In the afternoon, Kirsten John-Stucke began the presentation of the District Museum Wewelsburg memorial site's work: the central educational aim is to strengthen democracy against racism, as well as to deal with the site's specific history. On offer are seminars for groups, but individual visitors are in the majority. The substantive emphasis is on biographies, but the attempt is also made to provide access through literature for young people and through relevance to the present.

Museum staff member Olga Heptin presented Wewelsburg Learning Center, which was built with European Union monies. The Center uses the history of Wewelsburg from 1933 to 1945 to provide access to European history. Ms. Heptin informed participants about the Learning Center's topics and its pedagogical goals with glimpses of its practical work. The offering consists of interactive media biographies of Niederhagen Concentration Camp's victims of various nationalities, including its postwar history, and the development of human rights in Europe.

Ms. Heptin defined one educational goal as gaining a historical perspective of the various phenomena of SS persecution in Europe and the differences of degree of terror. Another aim is to convey what it meant to be a camp inmate and carry out forced labor, whereby the origin of the victims is examined (for example French or ethnic-German prisoners). This work also stands in the context of creating a European identity, a discourse that requires fundamental discussion and mutual exchange in order to produce an overall

societal awareness and to support human rights and democratic institutions in the European Union. She lamented that general knowledge of the SS and the crimes of the Nazis is too limited. She explained that the use of interactive media is part of an integrated concept of the Learning Center, permanent exhibition, and historical site.

In conclusion, Norbert Ellermann, a freelance employee at the memorial, elucidated the archaeological research in the area of Niederhagen Concentration Camp's shooting range, whose purpose in the project work with young people is to arouse interest in the topic.

The discussion covered problems like current rightwing radicalism, which brings ideology and symbols to the memorial site and whose new myths must be combated. The relationship between the memorial site and the community's residents is described as balanced today, after a protracted process of defensiveness, appropriation, and commemoration in the long development of the postwar era. People with family-biographical access are not the theme of the permanent exhibition, but are integrated in the educational work by means of books and discussions.

The exhibition organizers place value on the difference between the presentation of perpetrators and of victims: the latter came to expression with many voices suffused with experience – in some cases with very emotional access. With the perpetrators, the aim was more a cognitive approach. The exhibition has received much public praise for this result of long discussions on finding a balance between ideology and crime, spaces and educational task. Since there were few or no artifacts providing evidence of the crimes, specific solutions to depicting mass murder were sought and are presented in the exhibition. Criticism was expressed about the somewhat monotonous design of the exhibition, whose color differences can be experienced only subtly. The permanent exhibition has drawn about 32,000 visitors since April 2010, among them many British soldiers (Paderborn has a British military base), but especially Russian and Polish tourists. Foreign-language audio and video guides are planned for the latter.

The day ended with a tour, guided by Angelika Brimmer-Brebeck, through the historical center of the city of Paderborn with special attention to the city's Jewish history and the consequences of World War II for the city.

Friday, October 8, 2010

Thomas Lutz, Topography of Terror Foundation, Germany, devoted his contribution to the specific way memorial museums in Germany address perpetrators. He combined this with

the postulate that it is necessary to differentiate among perpetrator profiles; it makes a difference indeed whether actors were integrated in the concentration camp system, the euthanasia crimes, the prisoner-of-war system, the police, prisons, murder sites, or forced labor camps, or whether they were responsible for Nazi persecution in cities. Finally, there are what can only be described as perpetrator sites, like the building where the Wannsee Conference was held, the Reich Security Main Office in central Berlin (today housing the Topography of Terror exhibition), and the Villa ten Hompel, the former police headquarters in Münster.

The history of specific sites with specific types of perpetrators is bound up in a network of memorial sites whose essential task is to provide a site of commemoration for the victims and their loved ones. These are uncomfortable sites of self-reflection. How can perpetrators be integrated into these conceptions? There is a justified fear of hurting the feelings of the survivors and of working against the aim of remembering the victims.

After liberation, the depiction of the perpetrators was of “socially declassed primitives” (Eugen Kogon). A study in 2005 showed that German schoolbooks do not mention perpetrators (Stefanie Rauch). More recent examples, like those of the Concentration Camp Memorial sites Neuengamme and Ravensbrück, show how important the buildings can be in this context for the memorial site work, since there are few or no artifacts substantiating perpetration. The exact determination of their provenance is very important. Society’s dealings with and the legal processing of the crimes supplement our view of the perpetrators as much as do eyewitness accounts with depictions of the crimes from the victims’ viewpoint. The crimes must be depicted from the viewpoint of the victims, and evidence of the perpetrators and victims should attest to the varying living conditions. The depiction of perpetrators and victims requires different forms of presentation in exhibitions. The depiction of the perpetrators should be as concrete as possible, integrated within the organizational structure of the Nazi system. The biographical access should also make the respective freedom of action clear. The role played by the “perpetrator society” and the reactions of visitors to the depiction of perpetrators must be considered.

The approach to the perpetrators carries the danger of repetition (Theodor W. Adorno); it should be illuminating and not exclusively moralistic. Thought should be given to visual presentation. In addition, for the Germans in Europe, the perpetrator/victim problematic encounters a particular conflict situation. A great degree of sensitivity is required from the German side, considering the multiplicity of memory. It is eminently important to adequately differentiate and to perceive singularities as such, rather than leveling them.

The human rights discourse in relation to memorial sites sometimes threatens to cover this up.

Heiki Ahonen (Kistler-Ritso Estonian Foundation, Estonia) spoke about how the Baltic states Lithuania, Latvia, and Estonia are dealing with recent history: “Between Red Star and Black Swastika – difficult choices”. After a historical introduction to the fate of these states between 1939 and 1990, Ahonen focused on the work of the memorial museums in the Baltic region:

- the Lithuanian Center of Genocide in Vilnius (<http://www.genocid.lt/centras/en/>);
- the Museum of the Occupation of Latvia in Riga (<http://www.omf.lv/index.php/lang/english>);
- the Museum of the Occupation of Estonia in Tallinn (<http://www.okupatsioon.ee/english/>).

The two last museums are located in a former prison and a court building respectively. Lithuania has a stock of files of the Soviet secret intelligence service, the KGB; the other two Baltic states have no archives at their disposal.

The Museum of the Occupation of Latvia in Riga, housed in the former Red Army Museum, still has a very emotionally charged exhibition set up in 1993. A problem with this exhibition is its lack of language other than Latvian. In contrast, the Museum of the Occupation of Estonia in Tallinn was not opened until 2003 – the first museum built in Estonia ever. The conception was worked out in the context of European historical museums with a very transparent glass architecture on the Danish model. The exhibition is arranged chronologically, with physical objects and media documentation. The facility is two-thirds state-funded. So far it lacks accompanying scientific research, but it has an open pedagogical concept. Ahonen made a plea for a specific viewpoint.

In the discussion afterward, the complaint was expressed that the Lithuanian Center for Genocide makes no mention of the Holocaust, whereas this is differently and better approached in Riga. Caution was urged against portraying the nations as victims by bracketing away the issue of collaboration. A narrative is needed, it was said, which of course could not recapitulate history in its entirety.

The contribution of Karen Franklin (Guest Curator of the Museum of Jewish Heritage, New York, U.S.A.) was not devoted to the perpetrator problematic, but presented the museum-pedagogical concepts of the Museum of Jewish Heritage in regard to individual special exhibitions (see: [http://www.mjhnyc.org/exhibitions\\_special.htm](http://www.mjhnyc.org/exhibitions_special.htm)):

- The “Keeping History Center” is an interactive, digital visitor environment. It conveys “Voices of Liberty”, a sound world consisting of voices of people reporting on their first arrival in the United States, including Holocaust survivors, refugees from the Soviet Union, and others. With the New York harbor as backdrop, visitors can add their own stories to the original-sound archive. Andy Goldsworthy will also provide the Center with a virtual discovery path, the “Garden of Stones”.
- “Beyond Swastika and Jim Crow” tells the story of Jewish scholars who fled from the Nazis to the United States in the 1930s and 1940s and later took positions as instructors at colleges and universities for Afro-Americans. A picture emerges of these professors’ unusual encounter with their students, their mutual influence, the civil rights movement, and the society of the United States.
- The special exhibition on the Morgenthau family tells the story of a family that, in three generations since its arrival in the United States in 1866, devoted itself to the American promise and their country and community in public service. Fascinating paths become visible: how their services influenced the course of world history, US politics, and Jewish history – a history of the rescue of refugees.

The Dresden historian Christine Pieper (Dresdner Geschichtsbüro, Germany) presented a new book project on dealings with Nazi perpetrators in Dresden, an eastern German city that, even twenty years after the end of the Iron Curtain, still has difficulties remembering its own share of guilt for National Socialism. Against the backdrop of the state of research, she elucidated the smoldering conflict over the memorial site law in Saxony and made it clear how – using the example of the memorial site Münchner Platz Dresden, a former prison, and a place of execution – one can sensitively approach a site with a many-layered, complex past. In this way, contradictions in forms of political tyranny were made visible. The conception plans a collection of perpetrator biographies with a broad base, so that various areas of Nazi injustice come into focus.

Tom Wulf (Geschichtsort Villa ten Hompel Münster, Germany) reported on the memorial site’s educational work with a thematic relation to the perpetrators at a former perpetrators’

site: the Villa ten Hompel in Münster, Germany (<http://www.muenster.de/stadt/villa-ten-hompel/index.html>). From 1940 to 1945, the Villa ten Hompel was the seat of the regional commander of the Order Police. With its regulations, orders, and activities in the Third Reich, this agency contributed substantially to the mass murder of Jews, Sinti, and Roma. After the war, from 1953 to 1968, the Villa was the seat of the compensation agency. As a historical site, the Villa ten Hompel is not only a museum, but also a learning site with a library and collection devoted to remembrance, research, and ambitious educational work. Special exhibitions addressed the topic "Compensation as a Task". 12,000 visitors come to the facility annually. The Villa ten Hompel collaborated with a Network against Rightwing Extremism – For Democracy [www.mobim.info](http://www.mobim.info). He said that, on site, the perpetrator problematic is also tied to the question of what the perpetrators did after 1945.

Luisa de Pena (Director of the Memorial Museum of Dominican Resistance, Dominican Republic) provided the participants with an information folder on the work of her institution, located in Santo Domingo, Dominican Republic. Its state-assigned task is to collect and preserve the cultural heritage of the struggles of several generations of Dominicans during the dictatorship of Rafael L Trujillo, as well as its prior history and effects (1916-1978), and to make them accessible to the public on the basis of historical research. It is a memorial site commemorating the state terrorism under Trujillo, but also a site to produce identity for the Dominican nation and a site of encounter, oriented toward the values of freedom and democracy. Ms. de Pena told the participants about the museum's intention to organize in Spring 2011 an IC Memo conference in Santo Domingo that will focus on Latin America (for more information, see [www.museodelaresistencia.org](http://www.museodelaresistencia.org)).

The day ended with the IC MEMO membership meeting 2010 and the election of a new executive board. Afterward there was a reception sponsored by the State Councilor of the District Paderborn with a common meal.

Saturday, October 9, 2010

Thomas Lutz presented the Memorial Museum Charter, developed by Günther Morsch (Director of the Concentration Camp Memorial Site Sachsenhausen, Germany). This position paper arose in the context of the discussions about the orientation of the German memorial sites, which have to deal with the necessity to integrate a Western and an

Eastern view of recent history. In this, it is necessary to take into consideration debates on the European Union level about making August 23, the day of the Hitler-Stalin Pact, into a common, pan-European memorial day. Lutz emphasized that Morsch's draft of the Charter should not be understood as a strategic counter-paper. The intention is rather to pin down a position on the international level, in order to avoid political instrumentalization.

The discussion brought a general interest in the Charter to expression, but also included criticism of the paper's Eurocentrism. Participants pleaded to take cultural diversity into account in the remembrance discourse, also with reference to the UN Charter for the preservation of the diversity of forms of cultural expression.

It was said that the existing need for discussion within the IC Memo should be met by setting up a working group and that the debate could be continued online in a blog.

The Chairman of the IC Memo, Blodig, drew a concluding positive summary of the conference in Wewelsburg. The next annual conference is to be held in Paris from October 26 to 28, 2011.

Dresden, Dec. 2, 2010

Dr. Norbert Haase  
Member of the Board